

Seeks higher fees

Council takes aim at video games

By Craig Piechura
Staff writer

If police are forced to inspect video game areas springing up all over town, then the city should hike the fees business persons pay for licensing of such machines, say Farmington city officials.

Farmington City Council members directed City Manager Robert Deadman to draw up higher fee schedules for licensing arcades and businesses with three or more machines. Stores with three machines or less would have to pay \$50 annually for a supplemental license fee.

In comparing the fees charged by Farmington to 14 surrounding cities, Deadman found Farmington charges the lowest amount of any city on amusement devices.

Currently, Farmington city officials charge business persons \$30 in the first year, and \$15 every year thereafter,

for a general business arcade license for businesses with four machines or more. Such establishments are also charged \$10 for the first machine and \$1 for every additional unit.

Businesses such as Godmar Drugs which have three or less machines (called an incidental use in the ordinance) pay an annual \$10 fee for the first machine and \$1 for one or two additional machines at present.

Deadman is considering increasing the licensing fee to \$125 for arcades with four or more machines. Stores with three machines or less would have to pay \$50 annually for a supplemental license fee.

ALL MACHINES would need an annual \$35 fee, if Deadman's recommendations are adopted by city council.

The city manager also plans to direct the planning commission to look into the need for bicycle racks at establishments that feature games. Further, if

an arcade isn't located in a strip of shopping centers, Deadman said, the zoning board may have to set motor vehicle parking requirements.

Mayor Alton Bennett asked Deadman to include all businesses when regulations are rewritten governing bicycle racks in front of business places.

Councilman William Mitchell wondered about what the council could legally do to discourage pinball and video games from opening.

Mitchell said he asked his son what kind of youngsters play video game machines at a local drug store.

"He said the same kids come in every day," Mitchell said. "It's habit-forming."

Video games are immensely popular at the moment, Deadman said, but he predicts they will fade fast like most fads.

"This is not the first instance of a business designed to attract youngsters," Deadman said. "We had the trampoline pits, the slot car tracks which took up a whole building. I've gotta believe that it (video games) will run its course. We can't prohibit it if that's what you're looking for."

CITY REGULATIONS prohibit anyone who is under 16, not 17 as Deadman previously reported, from entering an arcade to play pool, pinball or video games without being accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

However, the stipulation doesn't apply to stores where there are three or less machines because the business isn't an arcade and the machines are

defined as an incidental use of the business.

Adherence to the law will be enforced by police, Deadman said, necessitating a fee raise "based on the additional inspections, police services and administrative overhead required to adequately police this type of establishment."

Many aspects of laws pertaining to video game ordinances are being challenged in court by video arcade operators. High fees are being fought as discriminatory and area restrictions are being appealed as arbitrary and a form of harassment.

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Three of Michigan's youth leaders will join for this seminar. They include: Al Kuhnle, national consultant, Youth for Christ international executive di-

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